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**ADOLESCENTS' FAMILY SITUATION AND THEIR
SELF-DISCLOSURE IN INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS**

SUMMARY

The paper aims at determining the links between the adolescents' family situation and their self-disclosure in mate relationships. We have investigated 378 pupils between 16 to 18 years of age and the same number of parents of both sexes. The adolescents are all pupils of grammar school in Lodz, Poland. The parents are of different professions: 80% belong to intellectual families and 20% to a working class. Three techniques have been used in this survey, the Jourard's Self-disclosure Questionnaire (1964), the Friendship Scale-LaGaipa (1981) and the Family Relationship Test by Anthony and Bene.

The obtained results allow us to deduce that adolescents with favourable educational situation are less selective in the choice of confidants and their discussions with mates present more details on problems they are interested in than those recruited from the group having unfavourable family relationships. The investigations also show that the links between adolescents' self-disclosure and the family situation are miscellaneous. This depends on the character of interpersonal relationships, so it seems that other factors also influence the adolescents' self-disclosure in mate contacts.

During the last quarter of the century sociologists, educationists and psychologists payed much attention to family problems. Their investigations often focused on parental attitudes, family structures, the family influence on children's and adolescents' socialization as well as on shaping the emotional relationships in the family.

The role of self-disclosure is often taken into consideration when dealing with emotional relationships within the family. According to the author's

investigations (see Niebrzydowski 1983, 1986) on friendship and self-disclosure, it appears that besides the educational atmosphere prevailing at home other factors have a big influence on adolescents' self-disclosure as well, but they are not the subject of this paper.

The aim of our survey is to find and answer to the question concerning the links between the adolescents' family situation and their self-disclosure in interpersonal relationships with their mates. It has been assumed that:

1. Adolescents with favourable family situation in which parents' attitude toward children is positive and characterized by self-disclosure in their contacts with the family members or other close to them persons outside the family are less selective in choosing target persons to whom they disclose problems affecting them than the adolescents with unfavourable family situation in which parental attitude toward children is negative.

2. Adolescents brought up in favourable family situation appear to be disclosing a larger number of matters to their mates than those with unfavourable family situation.

3. Adolescents' self-disclosure in mate relationships varies according to the type of interpersonal relationship:

a) the strongest link occurs between the family situation and the degree of self-disclosure among acquaintances (newly-known persons),

b) the weakest link occurs between the family situation and the degree of self-disclosure in the contacts with mates called friends.

In the initial assumptions, it has also been supposed that the degree of parents' self-disclosure within and outside the family has a substantial influence on the adolescents' self-disclosure in their contacts with mates.

PROCEDURE

The survey encompassed 378 pupils between 16–18 years of age and the same number of parents. Three methods of research have been used: Jourard's Self-disclosure Questionnaire (1964), Friendship Scale by LaGaipa (1981), and Family Relationship Test by Anthony and Bene. The first two were considered elementary, the Self-disclosure Questionnaire was used to diagnose the measures of adolescents' and parents' self-disclosure (broad-mindedness, intensiveness and selectivity), the Friendship Scale to determine and differentiate interpersonal relationships (acquaintance, comradeship and friendship), and the Family Relationship Test to investigate parents' attitudes.

Considering the wide acquaintance with these techniques in the Western Europe and USA, we do not need to describe them in details. In Polish literature, they have been raised many times in the papers by the author

of this article (see Niebrzydowski 1983, 1986, 1984). The reliability of the Polish adaptation of the quoted techniques (Jourard 1984 and LaGaipa 1981) has been verified by Niebrzydowski and Plaszczyński (1989).

ANALYSIS OF THE OBTAINED RESULTS

The investigations conducted on the basis of Anthony and Bene's Test distinguish two groups of adolescents. The first group comprises the adolescents with favourable family situation from the educational point of view, in which the relationships with the parents are positive or ambivalent. The parents of these adolescents are characterized by normal parental attitudes and self-disclosure within the family as well as in their contacts with mates. To the second group belong the adolescents who highly estimate the mother and lowly the father, or highly or moderately the mother and lowly the father. The family situation of this group, according to the results obtained on the basis of Anthony and Bene's Test, is considered to be unfavourable. Moreover, the parents of this adolescent group have a low degree of self-disclosure. The data obtained by means of Jourard's SdQ show the degrees of self-disclosure of these adolescents towards their mates, which are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Adolescents' family situation and subjects' degree of self-disclosure in contacts with mates (in %)

Adolescents' degree of self-disclosure in contacts with mates	Subjects' family situation	
	positive	negative
Low	5	43
Medium	52	57
High	43	0

The value $\chi^2 = 15,58$ confirms that a statistically substantial difference exists between the degree of self-disclosure of the investigated adolescents in mate contacts and their family situation. Besides, a division has been provided on the basis of selectivity¹ of the target persons of disclosure. The percentage of the adolescents belonging to the group with favourable and unfavourable family situations concerning selectivity is presented in Table 2.

¹ By „selectivity” we mean with how many partners of the interaction a given person converses on topics she/he is interested in. If one or two, it is considered selective, three or four moderately selective, and more than four low-selective.

Table 2

Adolescents' family situation and their choice of the target persons (in %)

Subjects' degree of selectivity	Number of subjects and their family situation	
	positive	negative
Low	67	4
Medium	24	48
High	9	48

The data contained in Table 2 indicate that 67% of the adolescents under survey with favourable family situation and only 4% of those with unfavourable situation present a low degree of selectivity in choosing the target persons of their disclosure. This means that favourable family situation favours low selectivity.

On the other hand, 48% of the adolescents with unfavourable family situation present high or medium degrees of selectivity that attests high anxiety among this group. The value $\text{Chi}^2 = 18,29$ with $\text{df} = 1$ and the degree of probability 0,02 shows that there is a statistically substantial difference between the family situation and the choice of target persons to whom the adolescent discloses information about himself or herself.

In order to define the relationship between the subjects' parental situation and the profundity of different bits of information disclosed to mates, we proceed to the comparison of the degree of self-disclosure between adolescents with favourable and unfavourable family situation concerning some general topical areas (attitudes, interests, studies) as well as questions related to more intimate spheres (health, personality, financial aspects). The comparison according to the topical areas of disclosure is included in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3

Subjects' family situation and degrees of self-disclosure concerning low-intimate categories

Degrees of self-disclosure towards mate concerning attitudes, interests, and studies	Number of subjects and family situation (in absolute numbers)	
	positive	negative
Low	9	45
Medium	153	135
High	27	9

Table 4

Subjects' family situation and degrees of self-disclosure concerning high-intimate categories

Degrees of self-disclosure toward mates	Number of subjects and family situation (in absolute numbers)	
	positive	negative
Low	99	162
Medium	81	27
High	9	0

According to the data contained in Table 3, more subjects presenting a low degree of disclosure of low intimate topics are to be found among the group with unfavourable family situation than among those with favourable family situation. However, the statistical analysis conducted with the help of the test $\text{Chi}^2 = 3,82$ with $\text{df} = 1$ does not show a substantial difference between the degree of self-disclosure of the subjects in contacts with mates and the family situation.

The data related to high-intimate topics (financial aspects, body, and personality) are presented in Table 4. It shows clearly that positive family situation favours personal and intimate disclosure while a negative one impedes it.

From the results contained in Tables 3 and 4 we can attest that our assumptions made above about the link existing between the family situation and the degree of self-disclosure of adolescent subjects in their contacts with mates is partly confirmed only. The difference between the two groups is not statistically certain. However, what is certain is that the adolescents of the first group (those with positive family situation) more often disclose in a frank and exhaustive way than those of the second group (with negative family situation) whose disclosure is rather general and superficial.

The link between the family situation and adolescents' self-disclosure in contacts with mates

Here we shall verify the assumption that the influence of the family on shaping the adolescents' self-disclosure is unequal and depends on the level of interpersonal relationship development. It would be the lowest in the case of friendship and the highest in contacts with newly introduced persons, i.e. when the partners of the interaction are weakly acquainted. Friendship, which is a relationship based on voluntary mutual acquaintance and understanding between the partners of the interaction, needs reciprocal disclosure as one of the conditions of its existence. At the same time, it

might be expected that subjects with unfavourable family conditions will look for values they lack at home, for example, in friendship among mates. Thus, they look for emotional links, frankness and security. On the other hand, comradeship, which is rather a widespread form of interpersonal relationships amongst adolescents, does not require full self-disclosure from the partners of the interaction. A completely different form of interaction are contacts with newly-known persons, still being at the stage of superficial acquaintance, in which neither full disclosure nor reciprocity are expected. That is why an important role in self-disclosure to newly-known persons is played by subjective factors like the way of communication, the degree of anxiety, and the feeling of security.

Table 5

Subjects' family situation and their self-disclosure at different stages of interpersonal relationship development

Subjects' degree of self-disclosure	Stages of interpersonal relationships					
	acquaintance family situation		comradeship family situation		friendship family situation	
	pos.	neg.	pos.	neg.	pos.	neg.
Low	90	171	0	0	0	0
Medium	90	9	54	144	9	63
High	9	9	99	45	99	81
Very high	0	0	36	0	81	45
Total	189	189	189	189	189	189
Correlation Qyx	0,37		0,5		0,22	
	Low cor. coef Clear dependence but weak		Med. cor. coef. Substantial dependence		Low cor. coef. Clear dependence but weak	

To verify the above assumption we compare the intensity of adolescents' links within a family with the degree of self-disclosure at successive stages of interpersonal relationship development. In the case of acquaintance, friendship and comradeship, we have used Spearman's ranking correlation Q. The results of the adolescents' disclosure of low and high-intimate topics are presented in Tables 5 and 6. The obtained correlation value confirms the hypothesis that the intensity of interpersonal relationships within the family determines considerably self-disclosure at different stages of partners' acquaintance. The dependence of self-disclosure degree on family situation is the highest in comradeship and the lowest in acquaintance.

Table 6

Subjects' family situation and the degrees of self-disclosure at different stages of interpersonal relationship development in highly intimate categories (numbers and value Q)

Subjects' degree of self-disclosure	Stages of interpersonal relationships					
	acquaintance family situation		comradeship family situation		friendship family situation	
	pos.	neg.	pos.	neg.	pos.	neg.
Low	171	189	81	162	0	81
Medium	18	0	81	27	108	57
High	0	0	27	0	36	27
Very high	0	0	0	0	45	27
Total	189	189	189	189	189	189
Correlation Qyx	0,22		0,57		0,32	
	Low cor. coef Clear dependence but weak		Med. cor. coef. Substantial dependence		Low cor. coef. Clear dependence but weak	

The degree of parents' self-disclosure and adolescents' self-disclosure in their contacts with mates

Assuming that parents constitute for the child a model of behaviour in different social situations and that the influence of this model is more or less effective, we can expect a similarity between parents' and children's behaviours. On the basis of this reasoning, it is assumed that the degree of parents' self-disclosure in interpersonal relationships plays an essential role in shaping the child's self-disclosure in his/her contacts with mates. To verify this assumption two groups of adolescents have been distinguished. In the first group there are those whose parents highly or moderately disclose information about themselves to their friends, close or not, and to new acquaintances. The second group includes subjects whose parents have a medium or low degree of self-disclosure.

To do this, we considered sufficient that one of the parents has a high or a low degree of self-disclosure in interpersonal relationships. Then we compared the degree of parents' self-disclosure with the children's one. This comparison has been conducted by means of Jourard's SdQ, previously used to investigate both parents' and adolescents' self-disclosure. The obtained results are presented in Table 7.

Table 7

Extra-familial parents' self-disclosure and subjects' self-disclosure in contacts with mates (in absolute numbers)

Subjects' degree of self-disclosure in contacts with mates	Parents' degree of self-disclosure in interpersonal relationships	
	high (group I)	low (group II)
Low	0	90
Medium	108	99
High	45	36
Total	153	225

From Table 7 we deduce that the subjects with a low degree of self-disclosure in contacts with mates have the parents with a low degree of self-disclosure. In the first group of adolescents, with parents having high or medium degrees of self-disclosure, the number of adolescents with a high degree of self-disclosure is larger in comparison with the other group. It means that a close dependence exists between the degree of parents' and children's self-disclosure in interpersonal relationships.

The value χ^2 , when $df = 1$, reaches 8,95, what at 0,05 degree of probability attests the statistical dependence. So the above posed hypothesis seems to be confirmed.

Now we put forward the following question: which of the investigated factors that generate parents' self-disclosure in interpersonal relationship with adults-emotional links within the family or the degree of mutual self-disclosure between parents and children – has more influence on shaping adolescents' self-disclosure in their contacts with mates? To answer this question we have calculated the correlation between the mentioned factors and the degree of self-disclosure of the parents. The results are presented in Table 8.

Table 8

Factors shaping adolescents' self-disclosure in contacts with mates (comparison of intensity and influence on the basis of correlation coefficients Q)

Correlation between the degree of self-disclosure of the investigated adolescents in contacts with mates and:		
parents' self-disclosure in interpersonal relationships with adults	emotional links in the family	mutual self-disclosure of adolescents and parents
$Q_{xy} = 0,39$	$Q_{xy} = 0,60$	$Q_{xy} = 0,50$
$P < 0,02$	$P < 0,001$	$P < 0,001$

The obtained value Q_{xy} attests that emotional links within the family play the greatest role in shaping adolescents' self-disclosure in contacts with mates (0,60), then comes the frank and open way of communication of the subjects with their parents (0,50), and finally the degree of parent' self-disclosure in extra-family interpersonal relationships (0,39).

It seems that the optimal condition for shaping a high degree of self-disclosure among adolescents is that in which positive emotional links in the family are accompanied by a high self-disclosure of parents in extra-family relationships, whereas the less advantageous is that in which there are no emotional links between the family members. The remaining factors have registered a lower ranking.

These data illustrate adolescents' self-disclosure against a background of family situation. According to these data adolescents have high or medium degrees of self-disclosure almost always when being brought up in families with a positive situation. In the case of negative family situation, irrespective of the parents' self-disclosure in extra-family relationships, the degree of adolescents' self-disclosure in contacts with mates is not high but at most medium. In the case of negative family situation and the presence of a low degree of parents' self-disclosure, 64% of the subjects under survey present a low degree of self-disclosure.

Besides, in the case of a high degree of parents' self-disclosure and a negative family situation, there is a lack of both high and low degrees of self-disclosure among adolescents. This perhaps attests an obvious adolescents' criticism and their self-dependent way of thinking since circum-spection and criticism become necessary when one cannot rely on his parents. It agrees with the opinion of Derlega and Chaikin (1979) who state that everybody controls the scope of information about himself which he is willing to disclose to the partners of the interaction. This process of controlling selectively the limits of one's „ego”, i.e. to which extent we disclose ourselves, is called by them intimacy.

The data presented in Table 9 confirm our initial assumptions arguing that parents play an essential role in shaping adolescents' self-disclosure in their contacts with mates. However, they can achieve it only if they are accepted by adolescents, which means that positive emotional links exist between them. This is another important educational function of parents besides ensuring their children the feeling of self-confidence and security.

Emotional links between parents and children favour the identification and interiorization of the norms and standards transmitted all along the educational process. This conformity helps to understand why adolescents with a high degree of self-disclosure belong mainly to those having a positive family situation. In the group with negative family situation, despite a high

Table 9

The influence of parents' self-disclosure on adolescents in contacts with mates

The degree of adolescents' self-disclosure	Family situation			
	positive		negative	
	the degree of parents' self-disclosure in extra-family relationships		the degree of parents' self-disclosure in extra-family relationships	
	high (group I)	low (group II)	high (group I)	low (group II)
Low	0	9	0	64
Medium	50	55	100	36
High	50	36	0	0
Total	100	100	100	100

degree of the parents' self-disclosure, none of the subjects shows a high degree of self-disclosure. Thus, it turns out that parents' frankness towards children is more decisive in shaping adolescents' self-disclosure in the contacts with mates than their self-disclosure in extra-family relationships. This dependence seems to be justified by the fact that a larger effect is provided by everyday life than by a model presented occasionally and not always within the reach of children's observation.

It has also been proved that the mother's and father's positive examples play a significant role in shaping self-disclosed attitude of adolescents toward their mates. The intensity of relation between the degree of mutual disclosure among a parent and a child (adolescent) and the degree of the adolescent's self-disclosure in contacts with mates resembles that with the mother as well as with the father (see Table 9) and even higher when the father is concerned.

These results confirm a family model promoted nowadays in which both parents have the same educational functions and emphasize an important role of the father in the educational process.

FINDINDGS

First of all, it is worth while recalling that the obtained results confirm most of the initial assumptions, i.e. that the family situation affects considerably adolescents' self-disclosure in their contacts with mates. It has also been proved that adolescents living in favourable educational conditions are less selective in choosing the target persons of their disclosure and tend

more to disclose intimate information than those living in unfavourable family conditions. However, in the case of disclosing general topics (less intimate) such as attitudes, hobbies, studies, they do not differ from those with other family conditions. The situation changes in reference to the intimate topical areas (personality, health, and financial problems), which means that the parental influence is significant when the disclosure of information of more personal and intimate character is concerned. The present survey confirms to a certain degree the results obtained by other psychologists (Skarzyńska 1979, Derlega and Chaikin 1976).

Thus, we can attempt to draw up a kind of family model promoting the shaping of high self-disclosure of adolescents in their contacts with mates. The most important element of this model would undoubtedly be the emotional links within the family, then would come the degree of reciprocal disclosure between parents and adolescents and, finally, the parents' self-disclosure in extra-family relationships. All these elements form what we can call positive or favourable family situation.

As the presented results show, the main factors determining adolescents' self-disclosure in their contacts with mates are the atmosphere of mutual friendliness among the family members and their frank and direct communication. We also deduce that these two factors favour the adolescents' acceptance of the models presented by parents and the interiorization of the family norms. Besides, it seems that the influence of family situation on shaping adolescents' self-disclosure varies according to the stages of interpersonal relationship development. It is strongest in the case of comradeship and a bit weaker in friendly contacts and in those with newly-known persons (superficial acquaintance). The family situation then is not the only factor acting on adolescents' self-disclosure but an important role falls also upon the degree of interpersonal intimacy between the partners of interaction.

Derlega and Sępień (1977) say that „in western culture people are expected not to disclose information about themselves to unknown people”. This perhaps explains the low degree of self-disclosure towards newly-known persons independently of the family situation. It is not surprising that adolescents are loath to disclose themselves to strangers. The same situation takes also place among friends. Friends disclose information to each other independently of their family situation, but the reason is leant on completely different bases than in the case of new acquaintances.

One of the conditions of friendship is the partners' good mutual acquaintance, while comradeship is such a stage of interpersonal relationships in which social rules give an individual a large option in choosing the target persons of disclosure. Discussions on general and personal problems

are admissible, but no one can feel resentment against his partner if he is unwilling to discuss intimate subjects. Such a situation does not threaten the duration of the interaction, while a completely different situation prevails in regard to friendship. A friend, willing or not, has to share with his partner the most intimate problems. That is why in the case of comradeship, more significant are other factors of disclosure than the family. These issues have been discussed more thoroughly in another survey by Niebrzydowski (see Niebrzydowski 1983).

Finally, we would like to note that we are fully aware of the fact that the presented results do not constitute an exhaustive answer to the question concerning the relation between the adolescents' family situation and their self-disclosure in interpersonal relationships. However, having in mind the scarcity of such studies in Poland, we can consider them useful. The more so, as it has been noted earlier (Niebrzydowski 1983), the parents-adolescents' degree of self-disclosure in interpersonal relationships is extremely low for the overwhelming majority which, of course, does not influence positively the effectiveness of the parental educational activities.

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**SYTUACJA RODZINNA MŁODZIEŻY DORASTAJĄCEJ A JEJ OTWARTOŚĆ
W KONTAKTACH INTERPERSONALNYCH**

Przedmiotem niniejszego artykułu jest związek zachodzący między sytuacją rodzinną dorastającej młodzieży a jej otwartością w stosunkach interpersonalnych z rówieśnikami. Przebadano 378 uczniów w wieku 16–18 roku życia; 80% badanych rekrutowało się z rodzin inteligentnych, a pozostałe 20% z robotniczych.

Zastosowano 3 techniki badawcze:

- 1) kwestionariusz otwartości S. Jourarda,
- 2) skalę przyjaźni J. LaGaipa,
- 3) test związków rodzinnych Anthony i Bene.

Badania nie wykazały istotnego związku zachodzącego między sytuacją rodzinną badanych a jej otwartością w stosunkach interpersonalnych.

Z tego wynika, że inne czynniki decydują o otwartości badanej młodzieży niż jej sytuacja rodzinna.